4:Armellada M-5 (no date) 1960
SS16 Pemon SS16

VENEZUELA

THE KAMAINO (OMENS) OF THE PEMON INDIANS

The following article is by the Capuchin missionary Fray Cesáreo de Armellada who forms part of the Mission to which the Venezuelan government has entrusted the care of various Indian groups of the states of Zulia and Bolivar. The author has dedicated himself to the compilation and study of the "oral literature" of the *Pemon* Indians since 1931. Various of his works have been published previously in this *Boletin*.

In studying the mentality of these *Pemón* Indians, we come up against this word *Kamainó* which literally means "he who or that which means", and which in use is equivalent to our "oracle" and "omen". For them, our futures are present times which keep approaching until they are before our eyes; but sharp-sighted eyes or an oracle can go forward to meet them like a bird, who soaring at a certain altitude sees coming what we yet cannot see.

The spirit liberated from the body during a dream (according to their belief) and the *piache* when he is in a trance and also free from the bodily enclosure through the use of vegetable drugs, are the great *kamainó* or oracles. And dreams should be considered as the commonest omens or predictions. Dreams are always interpreted on the basis of similarity, which is the great principle and the great error of these Indians: to think that the similar has an effect upon the similar (e. g., a leaf shaped like a deer's ear, into the deer); that the name and the image are the thing named or represented not only in language or in art, but also in the field of chance; that sickness of one member of the family will necessarily and physiologically have a repercussion on all of the relatives, etc.

Here we limit our study to certain natural occurrences which many times we have heard the *Pemón* Indians interpret as omens or warnings of things that are going to happen. I have always asked, how can a spider know this, how can a chicken know more than we do. And the answer were always the same: "truly it is strange, but so it is".

The principal *kamainó*, heard interpreted as omens by the Indians during the years of our stay among them, are:

[R72 contains no English TEXT--Analyst]

157 522 because this would be a head measurement that was really worth-while. A young unmarried man taking a length of cloth for a woman's dress as part of his pay was surrounded by a crowd making robustly insulting remarks accompanied [824] by loud guffaws in which he sheepishly joined. Even a happy surprise that is [384] not essentially humorous, such as unexpectedly encountering a tree full of ripe [302] "caruto" fruits (used for face paint), is an occasion for long laughter.

There are two noteworthy differences from supposedly more civilized humor, and these are decidedly in the Kamarakoto's favor: we saw no case in which a physical injury or indignity was considered funny, and crude practical jokes and the startling or frightening of anyone were expressly avoided and considered quite the opposite of humorous.

Emotional Adjustment.

171 158 In northern Venezuela we observed that most members of the peon class are definitely neurotic.[224] Most of them live oppressed by anxiety, ridden by fear of almost everything around them, and in a state of worry with few and 158 brief remissions. The opposite is true of the Kamarakotos. No neurotic individ- [157] uals or states were observed among them. Anxiety and worry seemed almost unknown, and the whole tribe exhibited a degree of emotional adjustment that 155 could not be matched in any "civilized" community of equal size. It will not be a popular statement, but scientific conscience compels me to add that the almost complete absence of a formulated religion is certainly one element in this remarkably good adjustment, just as the burden of such a religion plays a definite and large role in the neurotic anxiety of the northern peones.[225] Another element, probably the most important, is the security and care enjoyed by the children, as noted below.

152 It is not true that fear is unknown and it is apparently, but not really, contradictory that the Kamarakotos are almost free of anxiety but are often afraid and have even been known to die of fear. They do not seriously fear [828] physical injury: what they fear is fear itself. They detest being startled and often show marked consideration in avoiding giving anyone a start or surprise. Playing peek-a-boo with a baby, so common with us, was never seen and might [754] indeed be considered a serious injury. They fear the kanaima, but in their stories of danger from kanaima the injury is seldom represented as inflicted by physical means but by a noise, or similar thing, that merely startles and frightens [539] the victim. I have noted the curious and revealing fact that in their version of the widespread "stachelsitz" (spiny bench) legend, the bench is not spiny at all and the damage is inflicted by fright and not, as in almost all other known versions of this story, by physical pain.

224, 225 [See footnotes on p. 333, category 116 - Analyst]